

## Appalachian Studies Association 2016 Conference Proposal

**Session Format:** Panel

**Session Track:** Appalachian Studies; History; Urban Appalachians

**Title of Panel:** Otherness Among Us: Cultural Depictions of Urban Appalachians in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Film and Literature

### **Content Summary:**

\*\*\*Preface The life styles and traits of Southern Appalachians has been depicted often in literature and film. This panel will discuss the meme of Appalachian otherness and its influence on two films, *Next of Kin* and *The Dollmaker* which are about Appalachian migrants to Chicago and Detroit.

### **Panel Abstract:**

The concept of a different subculture or “sense of otherness” as Henry Shapiro (1978) has called it, has influenced authors and, later, screen writers since the nineteenth century. The meme of Appalachian otherness originated in 1873 with the publication of Will Wallace Harney’s article *A Strange Land and Peculiar People*. This was, in turn, was carried forward by other local color writers. The perception of a region “in but not of America” became conventional wisdom after academics wrote about it in the 1890s and Horace Kephart and John C. Campbell published their books in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Novelist also portrayed the culture and traits of people living in the Southern Appalachian mountains. John Fox, Jr.’s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908) depicted a progressive outsider confronting the peculiar ways of mountain society. The meme of otherness was repeated later in stories by Jesse Stuart, Rebecca Caudill, Harriett Arnow, and Willa Dykeman. Hollywood writers also pictured mountaineers as different from mainstream Americans. Films such as *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, *Sergeant York*, and *Deliverance* highlighted the sense of otherness. These same viewpoints were held by urban residents as Appalachian migrants moved into northern cities during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The conflict between the values of Appalachian migrants and urbanites is shown in two films, *Next of Kin* about an Appalachian family pitted against a Chicago crime family some have jokingly referred to as “The Hillbillies against the Mob” and *The Dollmaker*, a television movie which tells the story of Gertie Nevels (played by Jane Fonda) and her Appalachian family in Detroit during World War II.

### **Summary of Participant Presentations:**

Title: The Evolution of the Meme of Appalachian Otherness

Thomas Wagner, will discuss how the concept of Appalachian otherness evolved over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The perception of Appalachia as “a strange land and peculiar people” eventually became conventional wisdom as writers and others discussed the values and cultural

traits of mountaineers. This sense of otherness created difficulties and discrimination for Appalachian migrants to northern cities.

Roger Guy, Truman Gates and the Transformation of Otherness in the film, *Next of Kin*

Roger Guy will discuss the concept of otherness and kinfolk from down home who come to the aid of Appalachian migrant and Chicago police officer, Truman Gates as conveyed in the film “Next of Kin” by contrasting and evaluating depictions in the film with those in his own work in the social history of Appalachians in Chicago. Truman Gates represents the assimilated urban Appalachian as contrasted with his rural kinfolk down home who convey his past and the transformation possible for Appalachian migrants. He argues that otherness is a dynamic concept being shaped by those it depicts as well as those who apply it as an explanatory concept.

Martha Billips, Harriet Arnow's Novel, *The Dollmaker*: The Nevels Family in Fiction and Film

Martha Billips, will discuss the film adaptation of Harriette Simpson Arnow's classic novel of dislocation, *The Dollmaker*, with a particular focus on the depiction of the Nevels family in industrial Detroit, an emphasis on the changes from the novel in the film adaptation, and a review of Arnow's own reactions to and criticisms of the film.

Sandra Ballard will serve as session moderator.

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### **Biographical Summaries:**

Roger Guy

Roger Guy is a Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. He is the author of numerous articles on Urban Appalachians in Chicago, the book, *From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown, Chicago, 1950-1970* and the forthcoming book, *When Architecture Meets Activism: The Transformative Experience of Hank Williams Village in the Windy City*.

Martha Billups

Martha Billups holds a PhD in English from the University of Kentucky, where she wrote a dissertation on the Kentucky novels of Harriette Simpson Arnow. She currently serves as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of English at Transylvania University in Lexington, KY. She teaches a variety of classes in American literature and the first-year curriculum. Her scholarly work focuses on Appalachian women writers, particularly Arnow and Lee Smith. Her recent publications include "Harriette Simpson Arnow: A Writer's Life" in the collection *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times* (University of Georgia Press, 2015) and "Siblings and Sex: A New Approach to the Fiction of Lee Smith" in the journal *Feminist Formations* (Spring 2012). Dr. Billups is also a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, the official journal of the Appalachian Studies Association.

Sandra Ballard

Sandy Ballard is the editor of *Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review* at Appalachian State University, where she is a professor of English and Appalachian Studies.

Thomas Wagner

Thomas Wagner is retired from the University of Cincinnati where he was a University Professor of Planning and Urban Studies and also served as Vice President for Student Affairs. He is co-author of three books on Appalachian migration and culture and was ASA Program Chair in 2006.

Technical Requirements: No. 2: Basic Dell computer with DVD drive and digital projector.